

Wisconsin court users survey results Summer 2003

The following information and charts contain selected results from the mail survey of Wisconsin court users conducted from May through early August of 2003. The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) administered the survey, which for comparison purposes was based on a 1996 survey of court users.

SURVEY SAMPLE

The mail survey was conducted in ten counties, with an appropriate size and geographical balance. Eight of the ten counties were the same as those used in 1996, however Ozaukee County replaced Manitowoc County and Washburn County replaced Sawyer County. This was done because there were not enough recent Family cases in Manitowoc and Washburn counties to meet the case distribution and time period criteria.

The survey also utilized the 1996 case types and balance between those types. All survey recipients had been involved in a legal proceeding (but had not necessarily been to the courthouse) within the past six months.

The charts below provide information about the case types and individuals included in the survey. **Please note:** the percentages in the tables represent “valid percents,” i.e. the percent of individuals who responded to the question (non-responses are omitted).

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	140	53.8
Female	120	46.2
No response	5	-
TOTAL	265	100

Legal Representation	Number	Percent
Full legal representation	101	39.9
Partial or limited representation	23	9.1
No legal representation	94	37.2
Not applicable	35	13.8
No response	12	-
TOTAL	265	100

Race	Number	Percent
Asian/Asian-American	1	0.4
Black/African-American	18	7.1
Hispanic	5	1.9
Native American	5	1.9
White/Caucasian	224	88.5
No response	12	-
TOTAL	265	100

Age	Number	Percent
18-25	51	20.5
26-35	47	18.9
36-50	101	40.6
Over 50	50	20.1
No response	16	-
TOTAL	265	100

Attend court in person?	Number	Percent
Yes	215	83.3
No	43	16.7
No response	7	-
TOTAL	265	100

Education level	Number	Percent
Grade school only, no HS	4	1.6
Some HS, no diploma	24	9.4
HS diploma or GED	70	27.6
Some college or tech. School	85	33.5
Finished 2-year college degree	25	9.8
Finished 4-year college degree	16	6.3
Some grad. School, no grad. degree	11	4.3
Master's degree	10	3.9
Doctorate degree	9	3.5
No response	11	-
TOTALS	265	100

Income	Number	Percent
Less than \$10,000	37	16.2
\$10 - \$20,000	37	16.2
\$20 - \$30,000	38	16.6
\$30 - \$40,000	29	12.7
\$40 - \$50,000	19	8.3
\$50 - \$60,000	21	9.2
\$60 - \$70,000	10	4.4
\$70 - \$80,000	12	5.2
\$90 - \$100,000	5	2.2
Greater than \$100,000	21	9.2
No response	34	-
Refused	2	-
TOTALS	265	100

Mailed surveys by county and case type:

County	Civil cases	Family cases	Small claims cases	Traffic cases	TOTALS
Chippewa	29	29	22	20	100
Dane	59	60	41	40	200
Eau Claire	44	45	31	30	150
Green Lake	15	26	14	20	75
Jackson	23	22	15	15	75
Milwaukee	77	70	52	51	250
Ozaukee	29	30	21	20	100
Vilas	23	15	18	19	75
Waupaca	29	30	21	20	100
Washburn	22	23	15	15	75
TOTALS	350	350	250	250	1200

Returned surveys by county:

County	Number	Percent
Chippewa	19	7.2
Dane	52	19.6
Eau Claire	37	14.0
Green Lake	28	10.6
Jackson	20	7.5
Milwaukee	36	13.6
Ozaukee	24	9.1
Vilas	16	6.0
Waupaca	15	5.7
Washburn	18	6.8
TOTALS	265	100

Returned surveys by case type:

Case type	Number	Percent
Civil	79	29.8
Family	74	27.9
Small claims	53	20.0
Traffic	59	22.3
TOTAL	265	100

SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

Of the 1200 mail surveys, 265 were completed and returned for a raw response rate of **22.1%**.

However, common industry practice is to eliminate from the denominator people who were deemed ineligible (e.g., family member wrote to say person is deceased, wrote to say they were not in court recently) as well as those with bad addresses. Once that is done, the adjusted response rate is **25.3%**.

It should be noted that both the raw and the adjusted response rates are comparatively low, as most large-scale survey efforts aim for a minimum rate of 40%-50% or higher. UWSC staff could not explain the low response rate for the survey of Wisconsin court users. The Center followed the original mailing with two “reminder” mailings asking non-respondents to complete the survey, and also extended the response deadline. Neither tactic was successful in boosting the response rate significantly, and the results must be viewed accordingly.

SURVEY RESULTS

The charts below show the findings of the survey, and compare them to the 1996 results. Please note that the percentages for each statement do not equal 100% because some participants chose not to respond to every item.

STATEMENT: *I did not have to wait too long during my appearance in court.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	58	105	27	35	34
Percent	22.4	40.5	10.4	13.5	13.1
1996 %	17.6	46.7	14.0	15.3	6.4

STATEMENT: *The total time it took to process my case was reasonable.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	46	103	41	29	41
Percent	17.7	39.6	15.8	11.2	15.5
1996 %	18.9	49.8	10.6	11.6	9.1

STATEMENT: *I was allowed to present all the info. necessary to make a good decision in my case.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	47	79	49	37	45
Percent	18.3	30.7	19.1	14.4	17.5
1996 %	15.8	42.2	15.4	15.4	11.3

* 1996 statement read: “The court had all the information to make a good decision in my case.”

STATEMENT: *I had an adequate opportunity to explain my situation.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	47	76	44	52	38
Percent	18.3	29.6	17.1	20.2	14.8
1996 %	13.4	44.6	16.9	13.4	11.8

STATEMENT: *I was required to complete too many forms.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	13	25	80	105	31
Percent	5.1	9.8	31.5	41.3	12.2
1996 %	3.1	5.6	37.1	38.7	15.5

STATEMENT: *The forms I completed were clear, understandable, and easy to fill out.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	25	92	94	36	9
Percent	9.8	35.9	36.7	14.1	3.5
1996 %	8.6	34.4	46.0	8.0	2.9

STATEMENT: *The court brought issues out into the open where they could be resolved.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	32	70	73	42	38
Percent	12.5	27.5	28.6	16.5	14.9
1996 %	7.5	33.7	33.7	14.9	10.2

STATEMENT: *I did not understand what was happening to me.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	29	20	59	92	54
Percent	11.4	7.9	23.2	36.2	21.3
1996 %	3.3	8.5	19.9	44.3	24.0

STATEMENT: *I felt my court proceeding was hurried.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	24	50	56	83	43
Percent	9.4	19.5	21.9	32.4	16.8
1996 %*	8.1	21.1	19.9	32.5	18.4

* 1996 statement read: "I felt like I was on an assembly line."

STATEMENT: *If I had a complaint about something that happened in court, I would have no idea what to do about it.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	65	66	46	54	27
Percent	25.2	25.6	17.8	20.9	10.5
1996 %	22.0	34.3	12.9	24.5	6.4

STATEMENT: *The court decision, in my case, did not make sense.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	45	43	51	76	46
Percent	17.2	16.5	19.5	29.1	17.6
1996 %	11.6	13.8	21.5	27.7	25.4

STATEMENT: *The court was effective in dealing with the issues of my case.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	37	80	56	47	38
Percent	14.3	31.0	21.7	18.2	14.7
1996 %	10.8	44.3	21.4	13.7	9.8

STATEMENT: *The court decision, in my case, did not seem fair.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	48	50	51	71	37
Percent	18.7	19.5	19.8	27.6	14.4
1996 %	13.6	15.9	18.2	29.3	23.1

STATEMENT: *The judge did not seem very interested in hearing my story.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	38	43	68	54	36
Percent	15.9	18.0	28.5	22.6	15.1
1996 %	13.5	16.4	20.5	33.2	16.4

STATEMENT: *Court personnel were available to answer my questions.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	30	91	53	41	39
Percent	11.8	35.8	20.9	16.1	15.4
1996 %	7.6	42.4	28.5	16.3	5.2

STATEMENT: *Court personnel were willing to take time to explain things to me.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	27	94	53	43	37
Percent	10.6	37.0	20.9	16.9	14.6
1996 %	7.8	39.9	29.8	16.3	6.2

STATEMENT: *I wish the judge had addressed me in some other way.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	22	35	89	74	32
Percent	8.7	13.9	35.3	29.4	12.7
1996 %	5.8	7.4	34.3	34.1	18.3

STATEMENT: *The court did not seem to care whether or not I understood the proceedings.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	22	42	64	89	37
Percent	8.7	16.5	25.2	35.0	14.6
1996 %	5.2	12.6	22.6	40.6	19.0

STATEMENT: *The judge tried to do what was fair in my case.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	43	76	61	35	38
Percent	17.0	30.0	24.1	13.8	15.0
1996 %	15.7	45.4	17.7	12.2	8.9

STATEMENT: *The judge did a good job of explaining what was going to happen in court.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	41	81	85	27	20
Percent	16.1	31.9	33.5	10.6	7.9
1996 %	10.2	38.4	27.4	16.2	7.8

STATEMENT: *Court personnel were friendly and courteous to me.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	43	99	63	26	23
Percent	16.9	39.0	24.8	10.2	9.1
1996 %	19.4	47.8	21.0	8.3	3.5

STATEMENT: *I felt safe in the courthouse.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	71	117	51	5	10
Percent	28.0	46.1	20.1	2.0	3.9
1996 %	25.0	48.0	18.9	6.0	2.1

STATEMENT: *It was a hardship to attend the court proceedings because of transportation problems.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	10	23	56	105	61
Percent	3.9	9.0	22.0	41.2	23.9
1996 %	7.9	20.5	24.0	32.3	15.3

* 1996 statement read: "It was a hardship for me to attend court proceedings."

STATEMENT: *It was a hardship to attend the court proceedings because it conflicted with my employment schedule.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	30	61	61	64	38
Percent	11.8	24.0	24.0	25.2	15.0
1996 %	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

STATEMENT: *It was a hardship to attend the court proceedings because of difficulties arranging childcare.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	10	20	68	82	72
Percent	4.0	7.9	27.0	32.5	28.6
1996 %	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

STATEMENT: *I believe my treatment in court was influenced by my gender.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	24	31	65	91	44
Percent	9.4	12.2	25.5	35.7	17.3
1996 %	5.2	8.1	21.7	31.8	33.1

STATEMENT: *I am confident that the court followed the law in performing its duties.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	47	106	46	30	27
Percent	18.4	41.4	18.0	11.7	10.5
1996 %	20.8	47.3	14.0	10.3	7.4

STATEMENT: *I believe my treatment in court was influenced by my race.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	4	12	78	91	70
Percent	1.6	4.7	30.6	35.7	27.5
1996 %	1.9	0.8	16.2	29.8	51.3

STATEMENT: *The judge treated me with respect.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	57	95	64	23	15
Percent	22.4	37.4	25.2	9.1	5.9
1996 %	16.7	48.4	19.0	9.0	6.9

STATEMENT: *I believe my treatment in court was influenced by my age.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	14	28	84	80	48
Percent	5.5	11.0	33.1	31.5	18.9
1996 %	1.7	5.8	26.9	32.8	32.8

STATEMENT: *The use of formal court proceedings is the best way to resolve disputes.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	29	70	93	37	27
Percent	11.3	27.3	36.3	14.5	10.5
1996 %	12.0	28.7	28.9	17.1	13.4

STATEMENT: *I believe my treatment in court was influenced by my nationality.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	1	8	85	89	72
Percent	0.4	3.1	33.3	34.9	28.2
1996 %	1.4	1.9	18.8	38.3	39.7

STATEMENT: *I believe it costs too much to go to court.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	62	86	67	24	18
Percent	24.1	33.5	26.1	9.3	7.0
1996 %	33.1	33.7	21.4	9.1	2.7

STATEMENT: *I believe my treatment in court was influenced by my income.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	26	25	72	80	53
Percent	10.2	9.8	28.1	31.3	20.7
1996 %	9.7	9.9	18.0	32.6	29.8

STATEMENT: *Court decisions take too long.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	32	35	95	65	30
Percent	12.5	13.6	37.0	25.3	11.7
1996 %	13.8	18.0	39.9	22.3	6.0

STATEMENT: *The court has adequate funding to meet the public's needs.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	16	43	150	24	23
Percent	6.3	16.8	58.6	9.4	9.0
1996 %	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

STATEMENT: *Overall, I was satisfied with how the court treated me.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	29	96	58	40	35
Percent	11.2	37.2	22.5	15.5	13.6
1996 %	13.2	44.9	19.2	14.4	8.3

BADGER POLL

Concurrently with the Wisconsin court users survey, UWSC staff also conducted a statewide Badger Poll. The poll is a random phone survey conducted regularly throughout the year to gauge public opinion on various topics. In this case, the Badger Poll was used as a comparison tool to gauge what effect, if any, recent contact with the courts affects individuals' perceptions of the court system.

The charts below provide information about the individuals included in the survey:

Recent* party to a court proceeding?	Number	Percent
Yes	39	4.2
No	888	95.1
Don't know	3	0.3
Refused	3	0.3
TOTAL	933	100

* Recent = within the past 6 months

Race	Number	Percent
Black/African-American	20	2.2
Hispanic	16	1.7
White/Caucasian	867	92.9
Other	26	2.8
Refused	4	0.4
TOTAL	933	100

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	455	48.8
Female	478	51.2
TOTAL	933	100

POLL RESULTS

UWSC staff read 5 statements and asked participants to respond; these statements were also among those utilized in the mail survey of court users. The charts below show the poll results. Please note that the percentages for each statement do not equal 100% because some participants refused to respond to an item(s).

STATEMENT: *The court has adequate funding to meet the public's needs.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
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Number	103	423	85	142	47	132
Percent	11.0	45.3	9.1	15.2	5.0	14.2

STATEMENT: *I believe it costs too much to go to court.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	327	292	84	71	35	122
Percent	35.0	31.3	9.0	7.6	3.7	13.1

STATEMENT: *Court decisions take too long.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	360	287	64	118	20	80
Percent	38.6	30.7	6.9	12.6	2.2	8.6

STATEMENT: *The use of formal court proceedings is the best way to resolve disputes.*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	200	318	47	232	111	22
Percent	21.4	34.0	5.1	24.8	11.9	2.3

Overall satisfaction with Wisconsin trial courts

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Number	28	444	325	39	22	73
Percent	3.0	47.6	34.9	4.1	2.3	7.9